Packing is often the least popular aspect of any holiday – but packing for Antarctica is particularly daunting. Not only is it the most extreme environment you are ever likely to find yourself in, but there are no convenience stores, outdoor clothing specialists or chemists should you forget anything. On top of that, you’ll probably be trying to pack light to free up valuable space, especially if you’re sharing a smaller cabin rather than a roomy suite. You’ll also be grateful for the smaller suitcase during the extraordinarily long journey to Antarctica.

One thing to note is that during the summer cruise season, Antarctica is not as cold as many people imagine, with temperatures often well above zero degrees. December and January are the warmest months. Think windproof and waterproof – and layer up so that you can adjust to the right level of warmth. The last thing you want to be doing in Antarctica is sweating – being damp and cold is not only unpleasant, but it can be dangerous. On that note: think about how your luggage is being transported to the expedition ship; if it’s going by zodiac, you want it to be waterproof. You’ll also need to check the weight allowance for your chosen departure.

We’ve chatted to the Antarctica experts from our member tour operators to find out what they recommend – and don’t recommend – packing for an Antarctica expedition cruise.
CLOTHING

Synthetic fibers can be preferable as they will dry faster. Waterproof/windproof fabrics are very important, as the wind is what will cool you down, and you don’t want to get wet in the polar cold!

- A warm, winter coat – but don’t go overboard with the polar gear; it’s not going to be -30. Some holiday companies provide complimentary parkas for passengers as part of the tour package.
- Waterproof overtrousers are needed for Zodiac landings.
- Winter boots with good soles.
- Something to cover your face and ears – earmuffs or earbands are good. or a good hat with earflaps! Polar fleece facemasks are great for when the wind picks up.
- Gloves – we recommend one “Thinsulate”-style pair with a thicker pair to wear over the top in case you get really cold. That way, you can still operate your camera, zip up clothing etc in the thinner pair of gloves.
- Warm wool socks – plus thinner socks (or silk sock liners) to wear underneath. Better to have too many pairs than too few, as they will get wet.

- Nice comfy shoes for lounging around in onboard – your feet will appreciate it after the thick socks and heavy boots. The easier to slip on the better – you may need to dash out on deck to watch a breaching humpback.
- Thin, warm base layers.
- Don’t forget to pack some more summery clothing if you’re spending a few days in Buenos Aires or Santiago de Chile before or after your Antarctic cruise. It will be the height of summer there.
ACCESSORIES

- Chances are you’ll want a decent **DSLR camera with at least two different lenses**, though it’s always worth packing a neat point and shoot as well. And don’t forget how fast **batteries** die in cold weather – bring at least two spares, and your charger. See our Antarctic photography guide for more information on equipment.
- Bring your **laptop** for viewing and storing photos.
- **Sunglasses.** Polarising is good, UV filter essential. You’re going to do a lot of squinting through the glare from the ice. Some people also choose to wear **ski goggles**, especially if they wear contact lenses, as this can stop them from drying out.

TOILETRIES & MEDICINES

- **Sun screen.** Don’t be fooled by the cold; remember all those sunburned skiers? High SPF essential.
- **Moisturiser and chapstick.** Antarctica may be cold but it’s also a desert; the combination of dry air, wind and cold will leave your skin and lips parched. Bring oil-based, rather than water-based, if you can; it won’t freeze.
- **Something for seasickness.** Ginger is a perennial favourite (stem, candied or pills), while some passengers prefer acupuncture wristbands or over the counter medication; your doctor may be able to prescribe something stronger if you know you are prone.
- Any prescription medicines you require.
EXTRA BITS

- **Daypack** for shore excursions—this should be waterproof/resistant, or with a waterproof cover.
- A book to read—and a journal to write in.
- A bathing suit! Yes, really. Your ship may well have a sauna or plunge pool—and some cruises offer guests the chance for a dip in the Antarctic waters. Can you say no...?
- Gym clothes—if your ship has an onboard gym, and you are planning to use it.
- Binoculars.
- **Eye mask.** 20 hours of daylight can be disruptive to sleep. So can snoring neighbours—bring **earplugs**, too!
- Plastic water bottle(s).

WHAT NOT TO PACK

A huge, thick piece of winter clothing or all in one **snowsuit**. Layers are the best thing to wear in Antarctica, as it’s often warmer than expected, and you’ll warm up fast if trekking or snowshoeing.

**Formal clothes.** There are not going to be black tie dinners on board, or cocktail bars and ballrooms. The mood is decidedly casual and comfortable. However, you may want to pack something a bit smarter if you are extending your trip in South America before or after departure, or if there is a captain’s dinner on the first evening—though “formal” on an expedition cruise is still relative.

**Torch/compass/Swiss army knife...** Expedition this may be—but you’re also on a comfortable cruise with a well equipped crew. Plus, it's light 24 hours a day.

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Photo credits: [Topbox - man and penguin: Andreas Kambanis] [Clothing: Pia Waugh] [Accessories: Pia Waugh] [Toiletries and medicines - ginger: Franck C. Müller] [Extra bits - binoculars: Dana Beveridge]

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